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BROWNSVILLE'S SNAKE FARM

St. Louis Men Were Interested in This Institution.

How Mr. Armstrong Conducts His Business in Reptiles, Which Are Shipped To Museums and Shows All Over the Country.

"Who ever heard of a snake farm?" asks a writer in the St. Louis Republic, who has evidently been a visitor at Brownsville. and found his way to the snake farm of Frank B. Armstrong near this city. The writer goes on to relate his observations quite entertainingly:

"The very idea, the mere question, is absurd. It would be just as rational to ask: What would be the use of a snake farm? Or, who would care to raise reptiles? Or, who would buy snakes? Or—well, there are numerous possible interrogatories, and suggestions, each equally preposterous in its trend. As snake farm! That would be a den of iniquity, an abode of living, writhing poison.

"Yet there is such a place, and it is managed by men who seem to be almost reckless in the disregard of their own lives. The men—Texans and Mexicans—go forth into the wilds surrounding their towns and habitations, boldly capture the snakes, put them in crates and carry them back, as prisoners, to the corrals on the international boundary.

"Down on the Rio Grande, or River Grand, only a few miles on the shore of the Gulf of Mexico, is the growing town of Brownsville. This thriving city is at the uttermost end of Texas. Across the Rio Grande is a settlement called Matamoros, and Matamoros is the beginning of Mexico, in the extreme northeastern section of the Republic.

"Students of American history remember that the United States troops crossed the Rio Grande, in the war with Mexico, at Brownsville. The town is, therefore, of some importance. But Brownsville has been heard of very seldom in the last fifty years or more until recently, and it might have remained in comparative oblivion for another half of a century had not a syndicate of St. Louis capitalists built the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railroad—or had not Frank B. Armstrong established a snake farm there.

"In passing, it might be stated that the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railroad is said, by its projectors, to form the shortest route from St. Louis to Mexico City. Operating officials of other lines express the opinion that the Brownsville railroad is the best-constructed of any new line in the United States. It might also be added that the National Lines of Mexico, which are controlled by the Mexican Government, intend to erect a bridge across the Rio Grande between Brownsville and Matamoros, and to build an extension parallel to the coast of the Gulf of Mexico down to the southern boundary of the Republic.

For the first time on record the Frisco System began, this month, operating through sleeping cars from St. Louis to Brownsville. The remote Texas town is in the center of many great irrigation enterprises, and it is claimed that the country around Brownsville is so fertile as to enable agricultural production throughout the whole year.

"Brownsville is a town with a glowing future. But its present and past fame is due to the Armstrong snake farm. Public museums in America and Europe, snake charmers and show exhibitors have long known where Brownsville is. From Brownsville

they get their stock of long, fat, coiling, bright-colored, foul-smelling snakes.

SNAKE FARM NEAR CEMETERY.

"Imagine a little cemetery lying a few miles from town, its white monuments and slabs contrasting with the brown trunks and dark, heavy foliage of old and stately trees. Imagine a ten or twelve acre reservation near the cemetery. This is the site of the snake farm. The dead rest peacefully among the trees. Creatures having the instinct and the instrumentality for destroying life are fed and cared for and raised carefully in the reservation.

"Snakes are not the only wild pets on the farm. Almost every animal native to that part of Texas and Mexico is kept there for the museum and exhibition market. There are the leopard, the bear, the lynx, the jackal, the whooping crane, the heron, the hawk, the rattlesnake, the black snake, the whip snake and living things that have never been seen or heard of by millions of people.

"Armstrong, the owner of the farm, operates it for business purposes. He has facilities for keeping the captives. He has men for hunting, trapping, transporting and taking care of them. When they catch a snake, they put it in a perforated box, and, bring it, thus imprisoned, to the farm.

"At the farm the snake is put in a corral. The average corral is about 15 feet wide and about 20 feet long. It consists of high boards, with the ends buried deep in the ground. On the bottom of the corral are spread tree branches—Sometimes tarpaulin is spread under or over the branches. Straw is strewn liberally on top. As many reptiles as can be safely accommodated are put in each corral.

"The length of most of the snakes is five feet or more. Some of them are longer than ten feet. They appear to be contented in the corrals, as the keepers have a faculty of making them feel at home.

"It is necessary that the snakes should be kept in the shade. They are indigenous to hot climates, but they cannot endure the heat of the sun. They are fed on live birds or frogs, and they show a liking for stray rats.

"The keepers say there is no chance of the snakes escaping from a corral. If a rat in the corral should dig its way out, a snake could escape through the same hole. But it is very improbable that a rat would bore out—a snake would eat it before it could finish a tunnel. Lately a rattlesnake, ten feet long, was seen escaping through a rat hole. A keeper struck him with a sharp machete, cutting him in two.

The snakes are sold to museums and exhibitors. It is practically impossible to say how much they bring to Mr. Armstrong. They are held at so much per pound, and the price per pound varies, according to the estimated value of the reptile.

The fangs are not taken out of the rattlesnakes unless the purchaser requests that this be done.

"The method of taking out the fangs is interesting. A keeper catches the rattler around the neck, fastening his thumb at the throat. An attendant takes a pair of long, curved scissors and with them lifts up a layer of soft skin that may be seen at the roof of the mouth. The fangs are concealed back of this soft skin.

"The attendant cuts off the long fangs. Then he removes the several shorter fangs that are in process of growth. After the fangs are removed the rattler need not be feared.

"A visitor, who had read snake stories, once remarked to Mr. Armstrong that a fight between a rattler and black snake would be

worth while. He had half a mind to buy them just to see a battle to the death.

"There wouldn't be any fight," said Mr. Armstrong. The visitor looked surprised.

"I suppose the rattler would do up his enemy in a hurry," suggested the visitor.

"On the contrary," Mr. Armstrong explained. The black snake would kill the rattler. The black snake would clinch his teeth on the rattler and bring his constricting faculties into action. The rattler would soon be dead.

CONDUCT OF OFFICERS TO BE INVESTIGATED.

Officers of Negro Troops May Be Called On for an Explanation.

Washington, Nov. 14.—It is probable, writes the correspondent of the Kansas City Star, that some if not all of the officers in command of the negro troops of the Twenty-fifth Infantry, who are discharged without honor on account of the Brownsville riot, will be asked to explain.

It has surprised officers on duty in Washington that nothing has been done yet in the way of an inquiry into the conduct of the officers of the battalion the night of the riots. It is pointed out that extraordinary efforts have been put forth to induce or compel the enlisted men, particularly the noncommissioned officers, to give information that would lead to the detection of the men who actually took part in the riot.

"I don't know anything about the circumstances at Fort Brown," said an officer of high rank this afternoon, "but I know what would have happened were I in command if such a disturbance had broken out. I would have had the long roll sounded on the jump and every man turned out. I would have had a roll call within five minutes of the firing of the first shot and then I would have had the quarters of the men inspected to see whose guns were out of their places.

"I would have had every gun inspected to see if it had been fired recently. In that way, within ten or fifteen minutes of the beginning of the trouble I could have known who of my men were away and who were probably concerned in the disturbance. If that had been done at Fort Brown there does not seem to me to be any excuse for not catching at least every man who left the post and took part in the riot. Every man would have been arrested on his return to the post and every man not present at roll call would have had to explain all about it."

Nothing has appeared in what the War Department has been willing to make public so far regarding the performance at Fort Brown to show that any of the things this officer would have done were done. Officers here have asked several questions which have not been answered. They want to know what the main guard at Fort Brown was doing, what the officer of the day was doing, what the commanding officers were doing. It is the expectation at the department that these questions will be taken up officially with the officers of the Twenty-fifth Infantry soon.

Late News in Brief.

President Roosevelt arrived at Colon, Panama, Wednesday, on the battleships Colon.

John D. Rockefeller and four other persons have been indicted at Findlay, Ohio, in connection with the Standard Oil inquiry. The allegations are kept secret.

The Countess de Castellane, nee Anna Gould, is granted a divorce with custody of the children.

Two Italian anarchists were arrested in New York who are said to be in a plot to assassinate King Emanuel of Italy.